

EXCERPTS FROM REPORT OF FIELD TRIP TO THE WESTERN STATES

Submitted to the Most Rev. Robert E. Lucey, S.T.D.
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the Spanish Speaking

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This report includes the states of New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, California and Arizona. By far the greatest number of agricultural workers are found in the western part of Texas, California and Arizona.

The braceros seem to be supplanting the domestic migrants everywhere. For the past five years they have been used almost exclusively in California. I was told by the various Employment Offices in the other states that less and less Texas, New Mexico and Arizona Mexicans were working in the fields and that the braceros were taking their place. This I heard particularly in Colorado and, as I said, in California.

I found well established resident Spanish-speaking people almost everywhere I visited. Archbishop Byrne told me that over fifty percent of his Diocese is Spanish Speaking; Bishop Willging told me that thirty percent of the Pueblo Diocese is Mexican; and there are little settlements of these Mexicans found all over the Denver Diocese. Denver itself has 50,000 Mexicans and they are moving in constantly. Salt Lake City and many surrounding cities have elements of Mexican residents. It is only when I reached Montana, Washington and Oregon that the percentage was not so high, but even there in a city as far north as Portland there are 3,000 resident Mexicans. These have been moving in in increasing numbers since the end of the war. Of course, the numbers in California, Arizona and New Mexico went into millions.

The care of these local people presents the same problems as we find everywhere. The greatest need is for priests who are willing to work with these poor people. This not only necessitates their having a command of the Spanish language but, even more fundamentally, an understanding and love for these people. As we have mentioned, some areas simply are not preparing any priests to work with these Catholics. It is true that many of the Mexican young people are now going to public and Catholic schools and are, therefore, learning English, but it is the old Mexicans who are the backbone of the Faith. Very often it is they who persuade the children to go to Church and to be married by the Church. It is they who see to it that grandchildren are baptized. Yet in many places the complaint of these people was the same: "The Fathers do not understand us," "the Fathers are impatient," or "there are no sermons in Spanish." There was rectory after rectory where the priests told me that the parish had groups of Mexicans, either large or small, and that they only wished that they had been prepared to care for them by learning Spanish in the Seminary. Now they are too busy to tackle Spanish.

The Protestants are hard at work everywhere and succeeding. As we have noted before, the greatest damage done by the Protestants is not with migrants, whether domestic or Mexican Nationals, but with local residents. Throughout the Southwest, especially in Colorado, New Mexico and California, I was told many times of the Protestant scholarships, literally hundreds of them, given to the more promising Mexican youngsters. They are making it a point to prepare

the more intellectual Mexicans and, needless to say, they are also preparing these as ministers to work with the Latins. Though a vast majority of these are destined for Mexico, Central and South America, yet they are also earmarked to work with the Mexican people in the United States.

I have asked so many priests the question, "Are the Protestants making any inroads?" and I have had so many divergent answers that it is hard to express the general attitude of these priests in a few words. All agree that Protestantism is increasing year by year the amount of money for this apostolate. This they wouldn't do if they felt that they were not having some measure of success. The priests also agreed that many of the Mexican Catholics who join Protestant Churches do so either because there is no one in our Church to care for them in Spanish, or they need the material help always offered by the Protestant Churches, or they do it simply because they are of that element in the Church which cannot follow the narrow path set down by Our Lord. Many of these priests say that a large majority of these fallen away are still Catholics at heart and that there is a good chance that they will call a priest in danger of death. However, it is necessary to point out that during the years that the parents associate themselves with the Protestant Churches the children grow up in a spiritual vacuum. Protestants admit that within a year half of these converts disassociate themselves from their Church and end up belonging neither to the Catholic or to the Protestant Churches. Religious indifference is now going to be a problem with so many of these people who have been exposed to Protestantism. This is one of the tragedies of Protestant activities.

LAY APOSTOLATE

One thing certainly became obvious to me as I wended my way through these western Dioceses: the lay people are not fully organized in helping to care for the migrants and the local Mexicans. In comparison with the tremendous work done by the NCCW, the Daughters of Isabella, the Knights of Columbus, Legion of Mary, etc. in the Great Lakes States, we can say that the organization and utilization of the Lay Apostolate in all these states are far behind. Some Dioceses, it is true, are progressing in CCD work, but as a whole the layman is not being utilized.

The work done by the religious Orders of Sisters who are in the field of Catechists and social Apostolate should be mentioned. Since the reason for the falling away of the Spanish Speaking from the Church begins with the loss of personal contact with the Mystical Body, it would be wonderful if more and more communities would incorporate this type of Sisterhood. When these Sisters enter a Mexican parish you well know the almost unbelievable results which follow. I am sure you recall the example I gave you of the work of the Victory Noll Sisters in the little camp north of Denver where the Camp Manager had actually paid Protestants to proselytize our people. Let me quote, if you will, what I had to say about this in my memorandum of September 25, 1957:

"I think that I can say that though our migrants have been neglected for many years, practically every locale faced with this situation is beginning to do something for these people. The fact that Protestant influence and activity dies out as soon as the Church begins its work is as true here as elsewhere. Let me give you an example. The area north of Denver has quite a concentration of domestic and foreign migrants. One camp near Brighton employs an average of 200 braceros and many more domestics. Since this camp is privately owned it has (or had) become what amounted to a Protestant monopoly where more than a half dozen full time ministers and lay workers conducted a program day and night. These are provided with living quarters and halls in which to do this work. Whether the pastor had attempted to do anything for the people there I do not know, but last year he happened to get some Victory Noll Sisters for his parish. When summer came the Sisters decided they could do something for these people. When they approached the owners of the camp they were told that it was not worth their effort since only five percent were Catholic. They volunteered to work for these five percent anyway. As they suspected, it turned out that ninety-five percent were Catholic! The Sisters then asked for part time use of some of the buildings, but were told that the Protestant schedule was so full that there was no time left. After much talk the owners allowed the Sisters two hours a day in one of the buildings, but one was during the lunch period when no one could come. This did not dishearten these Sisters. They went out in the evening and when Sister Justina, the spark of the program, saw that the braceros had entered a building for the Protestant movie she went right in behind them and in front of the Protestant minister said to them in Spanish, 'This is a free country. You can watch a movie if you want, but if you love Our Lady of Guadalupe, come outside with me for a rosary.' All left but a half dozen. The next morning the Sisters gathered up the children about 8:30 and started catechism classes under the trees. This angered the Protestants since their school started at nine. The Sisters kept the kids all day. The next morning when the Sister went to the camp at 8:30 they found that the Protestants had started classes at 8:00. But the minute that the children saw the Sisters they jumped out of the windows and ran out of the doors leaving the Protestant classrooms empty. This was too much for the Protestants. They stormed out to Sister Justina, 'what's the idea of taking our children'. ' Sister turned to the children and asked, 'Is there any one here that is not a Catholic?' Not one answered. Sister then turned to the ministers, 'Do any of you teach religion to these children?' They all answered with a definite (but untrue) 'no.' Sister then said to them: 'All right, we will teach them religion during the day. You can have them after supper for recreation.' Since then all of the religious instruction has been given by the Sisters and the Protestants have given up this part of the apostolate."

BRACEROS

Compliance

HOUSING

I think we can say that the housing requirements, as stated in Article 2 of the Standard Work Contract, are now generally met. This does not mean, however, that just because the letter of the law has been fulfilled the atmosphere around all of these lodgings is wholesome or in any way decent. In all the sixty dioceses in which I have worked only two places have gone to the expense or effort of providing the men with recreational facilities. Some had provided a TV set or radio but none had done any more than that. There were areas where there was no running water, others where the bathing facilities were bad or non-existent, and others where the surroundings of the camp were so terrible that I am sure no American would work there for any wage.

WAGES

Article 4 of the Standard Work Contract states that men who do specialized work such as operating machinery, tractors, etc. are to be recompensed with wages commensurate with this work. Many men complained to me that this was not the case at all. One man operating a tractor in the Pueblo area told me that when he asked his boss about being paid what the other operators were making the boss told him that he should not complain since the work was really easier. Of course, this was a breach of the contract.

Article 15 of the International Agreement says that "in no case shall the Secretary of Labor make a certification on the basis of any job order which specifies a wage rate found by the Secretary of Labor to be insufficient to cover the Mexican worker's normal living needs." Article 16 states that "the employer shall guarantee the Mexican worker the opportunity to work for at least three-fourths of the work days of the total period during the Work Contract." Article 18 states that "when the worker is not given the opportunity to work at least four hours a day because of weather or conditions beyond his control he is to receive subsistence from the employer."

Your Excellency, all these things are just so many words. Time after time not only in the west but also in all of the states I found men who were not being paid enough to cover their "normal living needs"; time and time again I have found men who were working much less than three-fourths of the work days; and not once did I find men receiving any subsistence for having worked less than four hours a day. As I mentioned in my last memorandum, along with the complaints about the food, complaints about the wages hold first priority.

Records of working hours in many instances are not properly kept. I have seen certificates of men who I knew were all working twelve hours a day and yet who were being credited and paid for six or seven hours of work. When I questioned them why they did not complain to the employer it was the same answer, "We don't want to be sent back until we have made a little money."

REPRESENTATIVES OF MEXICAN WORKERS

Article 21 of the Agreement states:

"The Mexican workers shall enjoy the right to elect their own representatives who shall be recognized by the employer as spokesmen for the Mexican workers for the purpose of maintaining the Work Contract between the Mexican workers and the employers, provided that this Article shall not affect the right of the Mexican worker individually to contact his employer, the Mexican Consul, or the Representative of the Secretary of Labor with respect to his employment under this Work Contract."

What a farce this guarantee has turned out to be! Individual men hardly dare voice a protest so how is it ever possible for a group of men to organize?

SPIRITUAL CONDITION

The bad effects of the Bracero Program on the spiritual life of these Nationals is nowhere more evident than in California, for there the work of the crops goes on all year long. It is common for men to spend nine months or a year away from home, and not at all exceptional for some to have been away from home for three years. One such man whom I met had not seen his family (wife and eight children) since 1955. When these braceros first come to the United States their Faith is simple, their obedience to the Church is unquestioned and respect for the priest heartening, but as the months pass, as these men are cut off from the wholesomeness of family life, as the boredom and the misery of the camps forces them to seek worldly if not illicit diversion, the priests notice a sickening deterioration of their Catholicity. It is not God's will, we know, that these people should be so lacking of the things of this world as they are in Mexico, but they are now losing something priceless.

Article 35 of the Agreement states, "The Government of the United States agrees to exercise special vigilance and its moral influence with state and local authorities to the end that Mexican workers can enjoy impartially and expeditiously the rights which the laws of the United States grant to them." This Article is being violated in their right to voice complaints, in their right to organize, in their right to fair wages, etc. I quote it here because the right to worship is in a sense also being violated. There are owners who have come to believe that they are doing the men a "great favor" by letting the priest come to minister to them. There are employers who hire Protestant missionaries to work with these braceros and at the same time refuse equal opportunity to the Catholic Church. There are employers who have even gone to the extent of absolutely refusing the priest entrance into the camps. One such man told me that if these men wanted to talk to the priest they could go down to the Church on Sunday. He went to the extent of telling me that his was private property and that he could tell the priest whether he could visit those men or not.

This is indeed a horrible situation! These men may suffer many injustices, may be underpaid, may be cheated, may go hungry, may be cold, but the greatest indignity is to lose their freedom. Our greatest heritage, guaranteed by the laws of the United States, is freedom of speech and freedom of worship. These rights are being denied the bracero. They are treated like cattle. The very setup of the Program tends to herd them into a mass of nonentities. Father O'Connor was so right when he said, "these men are captives." They are captives not only of the poverty found in their home country, but also of the inefficient enforcement of all the guarantees of the International Agreement and Work Contract which result in such a vast and large use of so many hundreds of thousands of men.

In Texas we had none of this static. On the contrary, we received very good cooperation from many non-Catholic growers who informed the priests that they were welcome to come on their property and administer to the spiritual need of the Spanish-speaking migrants. Here we would like to give credit where it belongs, namely, to the Department of Labor, especially to the Regional Office in Dallas and more particularly to Mr. Bernard Fox, their field representative. Mr. Fox met with the different farm associations and explained to the growers that it was the duty of the United States Employment Security to see that the Standard Work Contract be respected by all employers. It was then pointed out to them that Article 35 urges special vigilance on the part of the United States Government concerning moral influence of the Mexican workers. In a positive way Mr. Fox then proceeded to show how important it was to give the braceros a chance to practice their religion. The growers saw the logic in all of this and were most willing to have the priests come and administer spiritually to the braceros.

Let me quote a letter from Father Thomas McCullough addressed to the EXAMINER dated June 17, 1957:

"TO THE EXAMINER:

We were disappointed with your series of two articles entitled 'New Deal on Farms', dealing with labor camps. There are indeed some new buildings going up in California agriculture, but that does not mean that there is a 'new deal' for agricultural labor.

They are also building new cow barns, chicken sheds and horse stalls but that does not mean that these animals are any less animals. Indeed, there are some of these animal shelters that will at least match the best 'bracero stalls' that are being constructed.

From the point of fact, however, the tumbledown shacks you pictured a thing of the past are still a common thing for our imported workers.

But this is not the important thing. No matter how spanking new the barracks may be, they are still barracks. And in these barracks, no matter how clean the kitchen may be, there still live the 'peones.'

They live a segregated life, separated from the community in which they work, without suitable representation and receiving depressed wages. Above all, there is enforced as a condition of employment the separation of men from their wives and children.

These men have testified to us over and over again during the last seven years that they accept these conditions of labor and the depressed wages only because of the most severe poverty and necessity that surrounds them at home. We, the American people, are taking dishonorable advantage of their hardship....."

FR. THOMAS McCULLOUGH
St. Linus Mission, Stockton

PREFERENCE IN EMPLOYMENT FOR UNITED STATES WORKERS.

"Mexican workers shall not be employed in the United States in any jobs for which domestic workers can be reasonably obtained or where the employment of Mexican workers would adversely affect the wages and working conditions of domestic agricultural workers in the United States. The Secretary of Labor may refuse to issue a certificate for any employer who he determines is not giving preference to United States domestic workers either when hiring workers or when reducing his labor force.

Whenever the Secretary of Labor determines that United States workers are available to fill jobs for which Mexican workers have been contracted, the Representative of the Secretary of Labor shall immediately notify the appropriate Mexican Consul and the respective employers that certification will be withdrawn and the applicable Work Contracts terminated."

Article 9 of Agreement.

Let us consider two parts of this Article: The unemployment of domestic workers and the effect on wages and working conditions. It would be difficult to deny that the existence of the braceros affects the wages of agriculture. As long as these men from Mexico are made to work for anything as low as thirty cents per hour our wages in agriculture will apparently not increase any more than they have increased in the last ten years. And from what I have been able to gather they have increased very little. The matter about "available domestic workers which can be reasonably obtained" is indeed a vicious circle. Domestic workers cannot be reasonably obtained if they are not offered reasonable wages. Though I have not made as thorough a study of this as I would like to or perhaps should have, I feel that I am probably right in saying that many a

man who has left agriculture to move into industry would not mind being back in the fields, even if he made a lot less than he does in the city. This is the general consensus of opinion of the priests connected with the Rural Life Conference. I have been waiting to get more exact and detailed facts on this but I cannot wait any longer to give you this report.

PRIESTS -- "Exsul Familia"

This year saw the greatest number of priests from Mexico serving as missionaries to thousands of migrants in the United States. The work they did was really heroic. No hardship, no sacrifice was too great for these zealous missionaries. All Pastors who had these priests working in the parish were unanimous in expressing their approval of this program. One Pastor said quite frankly, "I would be lost were it not for the Spanish-speaking priests from Mexico."

We cannot question the fact that the Mexican priests make a sacrifice in leaving their parishes by coming to a strange country, and also that for the most part they do a very good job during the few weeks they spend in our midst. But one wonders whether a diocese is not in many instances putting off its own obligation of taking care of their Spanish-speaking migrants and residents. As I pointed out before, the care of the Spanish Speaking is facing dioceses everywhere. Only until local priests are prepared to understand these people and to speak their language will they be properly cared for. As I see it many dioceses are turning to the priests from Mexico to do this work for them while at the same time they all realize that their own clergy must be prepared for the Spanish-speaking Apostolate in the future.

OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE

I am happy to report that the consecration of families and homes to Our Lady of Guadalupe, which this office initiated and sponsored, has met with heartening success. In the six months in which this Apostolate has existed, over thirty thousand families have made this consecration and these have not been restricted to the Southwest alone, not even to this country. People in every state of the Union, in Canada, Central and South America and Puerto Rico have asked us to provide them with these consecrations.

Since Our Lady of Guadalupe has, in God's Providence, implanted and protected the Faith of the Mexican people, it is quite alarming to me how many of our Mexicans here in Texas and throughout the entire Southwest are forgetting their previous heritage. It is our duty to explain to the children and the teenagers of high school age what Our Lady of Guadalupe means to Mexico, its history and its culture, and more important, what she means to them.

It seems to me that if there be one "sine qua non" in the Spanish-speaking Apostolate, it would be to propagate, encourage and fan the flames of love that these people should have for their spiritual Mother and Protectress.